Introduction

"In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel" (Isaiah 4:2 NIV).

The objective of biblical exegesis is to interpret the biblical text to discover the author's intended meaning. This must be done in a spirit of humility and prayer, knowing that the ultimate author is the Holy Spirit speaking through His chosen mouthpiece.

Some passages of Scripture lend themselves to clearly understanding the author's intent. These passages leave little to no room for multiple interpretations. Other passages use symbolic language, such as the prophet Isaiah's usage (4:2) of the phrase "the Branch of the Lord," and have resulted in multiple interpretations among many respected and beloved biblical expositors. Who is the "Branch of the Lord" in this early chapter of Isaiah? What does the prophet want his listeners and readers to understand by using this term? How does the "Branch" fit into the immediate context of Isaiah's prophecy? How does it fit into the broader context of the book of Isaiah and beyond to other prophetical writings in the revelation of God? What relevance does this passage, and other "Branch" passages, have to the Christian church in the twenty-first century?

This paper aims to study the symbolic meaning that Isaiah associates with the word "Branch." The goal is to understand the branch's rich purpose and function in God's gracious plan of redemption. Is this symbolic word commonly used among the prophets? Are there distinct differences?

A symbol can be defined as "an image that stands for something in addition to its literal meaning. It is more laden with meaning than simply the connotations of the straight image."[1] The "Branch" presented by the inspired writers far exceeds the word's literal meaning.

The term is used prominently in the prophet's frequent emphasis on God's restorative and redeeming work of His covenant people. The "Branch" is part of a family tree metaphor. It is part of the line of David leading all the way to the "son of David" (Matthew 1:1 NIV).

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[1] Leland Ryken, ed. Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1998), XIV.

Ultimately, this study will show that this wonderful symbol or type, and its function of restoration and salvation, finds its glorious fulfillment in the great anti-type: the Lord Jesus Christ, the anointed Messiah.

Definition of "Branch"

There are two Hebrew words translated as "Branch" in the primary Old Testament "Branch prophecies" (Isa. 4:2; 11:1; Jer. 23:5; Jer. 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). One word is "tsemach" צמח and is used in all the above-mentioned verses for "Branch" except for Isaiah 11:1. "Tsemach" has the meaning sprout, or growth. The "branch" can be considered synonymous with the "sprout" of the Lord. Its first usage in Holy Scripture is found in the book of Genesis and is used to reflect something that grows. "And he overthrew those cities and all the plain and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which **grew** upon the ground" (Gen 19:25 KJV). The next usage of "tsemach" is found in Psalm 65 with reference to growth. The context of this portion of Psalm 65 refers to God's blessing upon the earth. "Thou dost water its furrow abundantly; Thou dost settle its ridges; Thou dost soften it with showers.
Thou dost bless its **growth"** (Psalm 65:10 NASB). Mark Futato, in his commentary on the Psalms, writes, "The word "tsemach" refers to newly sprouting vegetation."[2] These two preliminary examples from God's Word convey that the fundamental meaning of the Hebrew word "tsemach" expresses growth.

In Isaiah chapter eleven, the prophet writes, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots, a **Branch** will bear fruit" (Isaiah 11:1 NIV). Here the Hebrew word "natser," נֵצֶר is used and is translated into the word "Branch." In a similar manner to the word "tsemach," this word carries with it the meaning to "grow," or to "shoot or sprout." The difference between the two words is that "natser" also implies growing green, implying a young sprout. The distinction and emphasis in this usage is the age of the "Branch." J. Alec Motyer writes, "Branch (neser) is from the verb 'to grow green' and hence means 'a sapling'. It is not the

[2] Futato, Mark D., The Book of Psalms (CBC 7; ed. (Philip W. Comfort); Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2009), 218.

word used in 4:2 but is the same metaphor, “the family tree,” referring here to the human ancestry of the Messiah.”[3] Some scholars link "natser," נֵצֶר with the word "nazeroth"נְצָרוֹת. This is very similar in form with the word "Nazareth." These same scholars link this word with the gospel of Matthew, “and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: ‘He will be called a Nazarene’ (Matthew 2:23). Many point out that there is no text in the Old Testament that directly states that the Messiah “will be called a Nazarene!” Could this be an early reference to the Savoir of sinners?

In summary, the two key words used by Old Testament writers translated as “Branch” have very similar meanings. Both imply growth and development. It will be necessary to carefully examine the context of Isaiah’s usage of the “Branch” to understand the meaning. As in all biblical words that are used symbolically or metaphorically, the context is vital to a proper interpretation of the prophet’s meaning. It will also be necessary to carefully consider later prophetical references to the “Branch.” Understanding how later prophets understood the “Branch” of Isaiah is important to understanding the meaning that Isaiah, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, intended his readers to believe.

Parallel Words

In developing an understanding of the “Branch” metaphor, it is helpful to look at parallel, or similar, words used in the Old Testament. These words are similar in Hebrew definition and more importantly in the spiritual significance which the prophet intends to convey. Given the agrarian society of ancient Israel, it is not surprising that the language conveyed by the prophets would be a language familiar to the community at large. Words such as “vine” and “root” often conveyed symbolic meanings that shared a close similarity to the “Branch.” At times these words alluded to the nation of Israel as a whole, other times they seemed to point more specifically to an individual. Like the word “Branch,” these words also can suggest a Messianic fulfilment. This can be illustrated in the eightieth Psalm. “Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over the vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself” (Psalm 80:14-15 NIV). The Hebrew word for vine in this Psalm is

[3] Motyer, J. Alec., The Prophecy of Isaiah (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1993), 122.

"gephen and carries with it the meaning of "twig," or a plant that has "twigs," especially a Grapevine. Once again, metaphorical agricultural terms in this passage represent something other than the word's literal meaning. The vine clearly indicates God's covenant with people. Earlier in this same Psalm, the author speaks in reference to Israel: "You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it" (Psalm 80:8 NIV). Once again, the idea of the growth and development of plant life is essential to the symbolism and spiritual meaning communicated by the biblical writer.

In Psalm 80:14-15, the author links "gephen," or vine, with the "son." The Hebrew word used here for "son" is בֵּן , or "ben." A number of translations, including the ASV, KJV and NKJV replaces the word "son" used in the NIV, NASB, and ESV with the word "branch." "And the vineyard which your right hand has planted, and the **branch** that You made strong for Yourself" (Psalm 80:15 NKJV). Dr. Mark Futato comments on this symbolism. He writes, "The image of Israel as a vine then shifts to the more personal image of Israel as a "son," a son God has raised for himself. The appeal here is the ultimate appeal to God's own purposes. God purposed to take the vine from Egypt and to transplant it in the Promised Land successfully."[4]

In addition to the vine symbolism, the prophets and writers of the Word of God used the word "root" to convey deep spiritual meaning. They did so many times in the context of a future hope. The prophet Isaiah writes, "And in that day there shall be a **root** of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:10 NIV). The root is identified as a descendant of King David's father, Jesse. Or, in the words of the Scottish theologian John Mackay, "The Messiah is now identified not as the Branch, but as the root of Jesse."[5] Again, we see the language of growth and progeny packed into these biblical agrarian terms. The branch takes root and grows. Here the term is explicitly linked with the anointed one to come as part of the family line of David.

We find yet again the "root" proclaimed by the same prophet. This time Isaiah is speaking of the "man of sorrows" who had "no beauty or majesty" that would attract anyone to him. "He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a **root** out of the dry ground" (Isaiah 53:2 NIV). Whoever the prophet means by "He," this person is compared to a "shoot" and a "root." Once

[4] Futato, The Book of Psalms 266
[5] Mackay, L. John., Isaiah Volume 1: Chapters 1-39 (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2008), 299.

Again, it starts small but matures and grows. Like a family tree, the root takes hold and expands over the generations.

Finally, the "root" in Holy Scripture finds its full and final meaning in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. No questions are left as to who the root is intended to be! "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the **Root** and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star" (Rev. 22:16 NIV).

In summary, early in redemptive history and throughout biblical revelation, various parallel agrarian-type words were used to communicate God's eternal purposes to His people. These biblical words used before Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah created a mindset, or a reference point, among the Elect of God that the "Branch" had rich and significant symbolic meaning. The "Branch" symbolism utilized by these prophets would not have been foreign to the listeners. This meaning would yield a great trust in the sovereign work of Almighty God. The prophet's use of symbolism, particularly the "Branch" symbolism, was often in the context of a future hope. It is a hope, "in that day," that is full of restoration and redemption. It is a hope not just for the covenant people of Israel but for all mankind! It is a glorious, revealed truth because the "root of Jesse" will result in hope for those who believe! "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; **The Gentiles will hope in him**" (Romans 15:12 NIV).

Foundations of "Branch" Before Isaiah

We've established that the people of God living under the old covenant were familiar with the preached and written Word that utilized agricultural-type language representing symbolic spiritual meaning. This familiarity would establish an important basis for the predictive prophecies of the prophet Isaiah and the later prophets Jeremiah and Zechariah. When Isaiah, whose ministry pre-dated the other two prophets, proclaimed to the people, "In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel" (Isaiah 4:2 NIV), faithful believers who loved the Word of God already had a reference point for understanding the meaning of the "Branch."

We can now raise the question, are there any specific texts that the prophets, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, could have used as the basis, or foundation, for the "Branch" declarations? One must readily acknowledge that there is no way to be certain. Nevertheless, it

does appear that two passages written years before Isaiah may have served as a foundation for the prophet. It is helpful to remind ourselves that the prophets were men of God and, therefore, men devoted to the Word of God. They were men who echoed the words of the Psalmist, "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long" (Psalm 119:97 NIV). As

Scripture is always the best interpreter of Scripture; it would stand to reason that the prophets of God would draw their preaching from previously revealed truth. Under God's guidance, it was their role to expand the light and meaning of redemptive revelation even further.

The first passage that may serve as a basis for the "Branch" prophecies is found in 2 Samuel 23:5. Commenting on Isaiah's usage of "sprout," or the "Branch of the Lord" in Isaiah chapter four, Edward Young writes, "Isaiah apparently reflects upon the language of 2 Samuel 23:5."[6] This passage states, "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow (2 Samuel 23:5 NIV). Dr. Young writes, "Taking up the thought found in the passage in Samuel, Isaiah now uses the same root to designate the Messiah."[7] The root that Dr. Young refers to is the same Hebrew word defined earlier in this paper. The word "tsemach" צמח is used by the author of 2 Samuel. He is writing in the context of the last words of King David. David, speaking through the Holy Spirit, reflects on the covenant promises of God, including the sure salvation that will come from the promised Messiah. God will make it "sprout!" This closely corresponds to David's "righteous Branch," spoken through the prophet Jeremiah. "The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land" (Jeremiah 23:5 NIV).

One additional passage that may also serve as a basis for the prophet's "Branch" prophecies is found in Psalm 132:17. "Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one" (Psalm 132:17 NIV). Commenting on Isaiah 4:2, E.J. Young emphasizes the importance of 2 Samuel 23:5 and this Psalm. He says both passages "seem to lie behind and form the basis of our passage."[7] The language of the Psalmist speaks of the future anointed one, the promised Messiah. Once again, we see the "Sprout" of the Lord,

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[6] Young, J. Edward., The Book of Isaiah Volume 1: Chapters 1-18 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 173 [7] Young, The Book of Isaiah 173

[7] Ibid.,175

and that which the Lord will cause to “grow.” The "tsemach" צמח is associated with the “horn” and is in the context of the blessings of salvation. This is also the language of John the Baptist’s father in the gospel of Luke. Speaking of the promised Savior, the priest Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, said, “He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David” (Luke 1:16 NIV).

The “Branch” and the Prophets

Following Isaiah’s reference to the “Branch” symbolism in 4:2, the prophet uses the term again in 11:1, though as indicated earlier, a different Hebrew word with similar meaning is used ("natser" נֵצֶר). It is very clear that the prophet is announcing the coming of the anointed one in whom the Spirit of the Lord would fully rest! The full passage is provided below:

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots, a **Branch** will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD— and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears, but with righteousness; he will judge the needy; with justice, he will make decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips, he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist” (Isaiah 11:1-6 NIV).

Following Isaiah’s two instances of the “Branch” symbolism, the term is used by both Jeremiah and Zechariah. Both prophets proclaim the “Branch” on two separate occasions. The following “Branch” passages are provided for reference:

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous **Branch**, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land” (Jeremiah 23:5 NIV)

“The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days and at that time, I will make a righteous **Branch** sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land.” (Jeremiah 33:1415).

“‘Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the **Branch**” (Zechariah 3:8 NIV).

“Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Here is the man whose name is the **Branch**, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD” (Zechariah 6:12).

Most conservative commentators agree that both prophets are referring to the promised Messiah. While commenting on Isaiah 4:2, J.A. Alexander references Zechariah 6:12. He makes a key observation that must not be overlooked. The prophet Zechariah clearly states that the "Branch" is the name of a "man." Alexander writes, "The Branch is here represented as a man, a king, a righteous judge, a servant of God. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that the same person, whom Jeremiah calls the *branch of David*, is called by Isaiah in the verse before us (Isaiah 4:2) *the branch* (or son) *of Jehovah*."[8] Mr. Alexander states a very logical rationale! If the prophets who followed the life and ministry of Isaiah all viewed their "Branch" as messianic, shouldn't that at least be the first consideration when interpreting Isaiah's meaning in 4:2? John Oswalt also asks a very pertinent question. "Is it not also possible that the Zechariah passages constitute an interpretation of Isaiah?"[9] The answer, of course, is an emphatic yes! The Word of God is like the increasing light of dawn! God's wonderful plan for revelation provided man with increasing biblical light until the closing of the Canon. The prophets who followed decades after Isaiah revealed clearer details of the righteous servant of God, the "Branch." This would find its wonderful fulfillment in the blessed Savior of mankind!

Many commentators who view the Isaiah four passage as non-messianic are ready to link Isaiah's description of the "Branch" in chapter 11 with the reign of the Righteous King ("and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" Isaiah 9:6 NIV). These commentators tend to ignore the frequent pattern of judgment and restoration found throughout the early chapters of Isaiah. The chapter nine description of "Almighty God" is one of a series of messianic predictive prophecies from Isaiah. Throughout the early chapters of Isaiah, the prophet narrows his focus on the Messianic King and Kingdom. Gary Smith makes this important connection in reference to the messianic sections of the early Isaiah chapters. He writes, "Both of these sections begin (2:1-5; 9:1-7) and end (4:2-6; 11:1-16) with promises of hope based on the eschatological promise of God's rule over his people and all the nations. These new oracles of salvation in Isaiah 9 and 11 are not just repetitions of the earlier promises in chaps. 2 and 4; instead, they are more focused on a Davidic king and the nature of

[8] Alexander, A. Joseph., Prophecies of Isaiah (Edinburg: Elliot Publisher, 1865), 123.
[9] Oswalt, John N., The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39 (NICOT; ed. (Robert L. Hubbard, JR.); Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 146.

his reign."[10] To summarize this thought, these frequent sections of promise and hope support understanding the Isaiah 4:2 "Branch" metaphor in a relational manner. These eschatological sections in Isaiah are not a repeat of the same proclamation. They further explain the great promises of restoration through the anointed King! To eliminate Isaiah 4:2, "Branch of the Lord," from this pattern associated with the great King is troubling!

The "Branch" of Isaiah 4:2

The two key "Branch" prophecies in the book of Isaiah are found in chapters four and eleven. Is the "Branch" announced by Isaiah in chapter four the same "Branch" proclaimed in chapter eleven? Is the "Branch of the Lord" proclaimed in Isaiah 4:2 the promised Messiah? Commentators are divided on this matter! However, the weight of evidence suggests that the prophet is speaking of the anointed Messiah. Two primary interpretations divide the vast majority of commentators. Gary Smith expresses these views in his commentary on Isaiah. He writes, "The history of the interpretation of the "branch/sprout of the Lord" has followed two distinct paths. One views this phrase as a messianic title of the promised Davidic ruler, the other interprets it as a sign of God's blessing on nature and considers the sprouting "branch" to be parallel to the "fruit of the land."[11] Understanding the full contextual setting of Isaiah chapter four is critical to understanding the prophet's intent.

"In that day the **Branch** of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire. Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain" (Isaiah 4:2-6 NIV).

In this section, the prophet shifts from an earlier focus of judgment to a message of hope and restoration! This is a common pattern in the early chapters of the book of Isaiah. Judgment

[10] Smith, Gary V., Isaiah 1-39 (NAC 15A; ed. (E. Ray Clendenen); Nashville: B&H Publishers, 2007), 233.

[11] Smith, Isaiah 1-39 154

transitions into a promise of restoration. The prophet has used the phrase "in that day" frequently before announcing the "Branch" in chapter four. However, in prior instances (2:11, 17, 20; 3:7, 18; 4:1) "in that day" was revealed to be a day of judgment! When we come to Isaiah 4:2, a wonderful new tone is discovered. John Mackay comments on this obvious shift, "Here there occurs one of those startling juxtapositions that punctuate Isaiah's prophecy. Just as the reader has become used to the phrase '**in that day'** being one more peal from the bell of doom, the seventh peal introduces a totally different picture. Into the devastation caused by human wickedness, there will come the startling in-breaking of divine grace, and so the darkness of 2:6 – 4:1 is bracketed by the revelation of future glory in 2:1-4 and 4:2-6"[12] The question at hand is does this new tone of promise refer simply to a future day of blessing upon the land ("fruit of the land") or does the promise refer to something far greater than earthly blessings? To help answer this question, Gary Smith asks three key questions, one of which has already been addressed in this paper. Mr. Smith asks, "Three questions need to be asked to decide which interpretation fits best in this context: (a) Are there earlier passages before the time of Isaiah that give a messianic meaning to the verb *samah*, "spring forth," a word that is from the same root as the noun "branch?" (b) Does Isaiah or other later authors use this term to refer to the Messiah, thus providing a later biblical commentary on what the biblical authors thought "branch" means? And (c) does the messianic meaning "Branch of the Lord" or the agricultural meaning "fruit of the land" fit the context in Isaiah 4:2-6 better?"[13]

John Calvin, one commentator who disputes the Isaiah 4:2 reference as a messianic description, has no difficulty understanding the usage of "Branch" in Isaiah 11:1 as the Lord Jesus Christ. He comments on Isaiah 11:1 by stating, "Hence we infer that this prediction applies solely to the person of Christ; for till he came no such branch arose."[14] Ignoring previous foundational biblical indicators (2 Samuel 23:5 and Psalm 132:17), parallel biblical words, and other messianic usages of "Branch" in the Old Testament prophets, Calvin interprets 4:2 as abundant grace that will yield food for the needy! Commenting on Isaiah 4:2, the beloved reformer writes, "After careful examination of the whole, I do not hesitate to regard the *Branch of God* as denoting an unusual and abundant supply of grace, which will relieve the hungry; for

[12] Mackay, Isaiah Volume 1: Chapters 1-39 123
[13] Smith, Isaiah 1-39 154,155
[14] John Calvin, Isaiah 1-32 (Calvin's Commentaries 7; trans. William Pringle; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 372.

he speaks as if the earth, barren and exhausted after the desolation, would hold out no promise of future produce, so that the sudden fertility might render the kindness of God the more desirable; as if the parched and barren fields would yield unexpected herbage."[15] Calvin's understanding of "Branch" is fairly common among many modern-day commentators. Oswalt writes, "Traditionally, beginning with the Targum,[16] *the Branch of the Lord* has been interpreted as referring to the Messiah. But almost all modern commentators dispute the interpretation (Calvin also). Their main evidence is that the parallel phrase *the fruit of the Lord* has no obvious messianic connection. On the other hand, if "fruit" is taken more literally, "branch" can be paralleled to it without great difficulty. On this view, the Lord would be promising renewed fruitfulness for the land, either figurative or literal, after the desolation of judgment."[17]

In support of a messianic interpretation of Isaiah 4:2, E. J. Young compares the relationship between Isaiah 28:1 and 28:5 with the similar relationship of Isaiah 4:1 and 4:2. In chapter 28:1, Isaiah announces a familiar message of judgment. He writes, "Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, to the fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley to that city, the pride of those laid low by wine" (Isaiah 4:2 NIV). The message completely changes in 28:5. "In that day the Lord Almighty will be a glorious crown, a beautiful wreath for the remnant of his people" (Isaiah 28:5). E.J. Young writes, "We must note Isaiah 28:5, which sustains the same relation to Isaiah 28:1 as this passage[18] does to the preceding (4:1). In 28:5, that is attributed to the Lord Himself, which in the verse before us is spoken of as the "Sprout." Indeed, it is difficult, in light of this fact, to see how a general reference to the word can be acceptable. This parallelism with 28:5 would seem to refute the view that 4:2 contains a reference to the products of the land."[19]

Those who oppose a messianic interpretation of 4:2 question why Isaiah does not refer to an individual in his metaphor like the later prophets. They reference the prophet Zechariah, who directly links the "Branch" with a "man." "Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the **man** whose name is the **Branch**, and he will branch out from his place and build the

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[15] Ibid.,152
[16] Note: The Targum is an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible
[17] Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah 146
[18] This Passage" is in reference to Professor Young's comment on Isaiah 4:2.
[19] Young, The Book of Isaiah 174

Temple of the LORD" (Zechariah 6:12). In another reference, the same question is raised regarding Jeremiah's usage of "Branch." "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous **Branch**, a **King** who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land" (Jeremiah 23:5 NIV). In this passage, "Branch" is linked directly to a King from the line of David. In support of this position, one commentator writes, "Furthermore, since the later prophets felt the potential confusion of the term 'branch' was such that they deliberately made it clear that the metaphor was referring to an individual (e.g., 'the man whose name is the Branch,' Zech. 6:12), it is surprising that on this earlier occasion, any such indication is lacking. Indeed, the following phrase, 'the fruit of the land,' renders a personal interpretation here quite improbable."[20] While the "Branch" is certainly made clearer by the later prophets, it is reasonable to believe that the Holy Spirit is shedding more and more light in advancing revelation, particularly as it proclaims the Savoir of all mankind! Once again, John Oswalt's question is extremely pertinent. "Is it not also possible that the Zechariah passages constitute an interpretation of Isaiah?"[21] The answer is yes!

Many sections of the book of Isaiah begin with "in that day." This "day" is a future eschatological day. It is a day of judgment for some and hope and restoration for others. Is "this day" in Isaiah 4:2 simply a day of abundant growth upon the land? Or is it something far greater and glorious? Should we understand "this day" and the "Branch of the Lord" in chapter 4 to have different meanings than "this day" and the "Branch of the Lord" used in later prophecies? Joyce Baldwin provides helpful comments on these key questions. "Moreover, the striking phrase "shoot of Yahweh" does not seem to be sufficiently explained by the vegetation which he causes to grow. The words "in that day" indicate that some new thing was to happen, whereas luxuriant wild growth and a good harvest were hardly remarkable, even in Palestine. No, in this messianic passage, the phrase is beginning to be used in a messianic sense, and closely associated with it is a message concerning the priestly washing away of sin."[22] The context of the Isaiah four passage is in reference to God's gracious work of washing away sin! "The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire" (Isaiah 4:4). To stress the growth and abundance of the land turns the central meaning away from the Messiah's atoning work.

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[20] Mackay, Isaiah Volume 1: Chapters 1-39 126
[21] Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah 146
[22] Joyce Baldwin, "Semah as a Technical Term in the Prophets," VT14:1 (Jan 1964): 93,94

Isaiah's description of the "Branch of the Lord" identifies the Messiah better than the land's prosperity. "In that day the **Branch** of the LORD will be **beautiful and glorious,** and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel" (Isaiah 4:2 NIV). In support of a messianic understanding, Joseph Alexander argues that this description of the "Branch" should be applied to the Son of Man. He writes, "To this interpretation,[23] which is adopted by Gesenius in his Thesaurus,[25] it may be objected, first, that such a subject is wholly incongruous with the predicates applied to it, honorable, glorious, sublime, and beautiful; secondly, that this explanation is precluded by the addition of the name Jehovah, a difficulty aggravated by the parallelism, which requires the relation between *branch* and *Jehovah* to be the same as that between *fruit* and the *earth*, and as the last phrase means the offspring of the earth, so the first must mean the offspring of Jehovah, an expression which can only be applied to persons."[24] Mr. Alexander makes a key argument in favor of a messianic understanding. The language describing the "Branch" is often ascribed to God! In addition, the relationship between the branch and Jehovah should be understood to mean that the Branch is the offspring of Jehovah! The fruit is the offspring of the earth. Once again, the evidence pointing to the Messiah is overwhelming!

Summary

This paper has sought to present evidence supporting a Messianic understanding of Isaiah 4:2. Symbolic language, parallel terms, later "Branch" references, and the context of Isaiah 4:2 all give weight to this wonderful and glorious truth. With some exceptions, most commentators, up until the last 200 years, viewed this passage in that light. Modern-day scholarship has questioned that view. Among them, some "anti-messianic" commentators are respected and loved for their conservative interpretation of the Word of God. Certainly, there is room for disagreement among God's people. Ultimately, the Lord Jesus Christ will make all things clear. He is the "Branch" that became the vine! "I am the true vine, and my Father is the

[23] Note: Alexander is referring to the interpretation that the "Branch of the Lord" symbolizes the land of Israel. [25] Heinrich Friedrich Wilhelm Gesenius (1786–1842) – A famous German Hebrew scholar opposed to a Messianic view of Isaiah 4:2.
[24] Alexander, Prophecies of Isaiah 122

gardener" (John 15"1 NIV). Like the needy men on the road to Emmaus, He is also the one we so desperately need to teach us the meaning of the words of the prophets. "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets he explained to them what was said in all Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27 NIV).

Though we greatly value the godly and scholarly men that God has raised within the Church of Jesus Christ and the many fruits of their labors, sometimes a humble and devotional commentator like Matthew Henry sheds the most warmth and light on our souls. A favorite of many dear believers throughout the centuries, Mr. Henry leaves no reader in doubt when referring to Isaiah's "Branch of the Lord." We conclude this paper with his precious observations and remarks. "Christ himself shall be exalted. **He is the *branch of the Lord***, the man the branch; it is one of his prophetical names, my servant, the branch (Zech. 3:8; 6:12), and the branch of righteousness (Jer. 23:5; 33:15), a rod out of the stem of Jesse and a branch out of his roots (chapter. 11), and this, as some think, is alluded to when he is called a Nazarene, Matthew 2:23. He shall be beautiful and glorious in the esteem of all believers, shall gain an interest in the world, and a name among men above every name. To those who believe he is precious, he is an honor (I Peter 2:7), the fairest of ten thousand and altogether glorious. Let us rejoice that he is so, and let him be so to us."[25]

[25] Matthew Henry, Isaiah to Malachi Volume 4 (Mclean: Macdonald Publishing, House, 1712 reprint), 27.

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